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ABSTRACT

This document takes issue with the concept of competency-based teacher education as presented in the New York Regents Master Plan for Development of Post-Secondary Education, 1972. It maintains that the competency-based concept completely undermines tenure and teacher rights to due process. Further, the paper takes the position that the teacher should have a part in shaping standards for certification and in determining curriculum; that the teacher can be held accountable for the "product," it maintains, is pure myth since teachers have little control over the educational process as a whole. (JB)

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PERFORMANCE-BASED TEACHER CERTIFICATION

by

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Two of the most hotly discussed new issues in education are performance contracting and performance-based teacher certification. Everyone seems to agree that American education is in a crisis of one sort or another and suggested solutions have become as numerous as the problems. This is reflected throughout the nation by the refusal of voters to allocate tax monies for school purposes. Although it is recognized that spiraling inflation plays a major part in budget defeats, perhaps the most significant factor may be the displeasure of the voters with the schools themselves. The first question they ask is, "What are we getting?" "Why can't the schools serve us better?" The intent of this paper is to define these new concepts and discuss the implications as it effectseducators.

What is performance contracting? Kowash (1970) states that performance contracting simply means the awarding of the job of teaching by the boards of education to a private industry or educational firm. These contract firms guarantee to educate children to a certain level in specific areas. Failure to accomplish this goal makes a firm liable to return the money given it by the board of education.

Performance contracting shows signs of becoming big business. Supported by the U.S. Office of Education and the Office of Economic Opportunity, sometimes using Model Cities and

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Title III (ESEA) money, upwards of 100 performance contracts have been negotiated since 1969. Studies have showed that students' test performances are susceptible to both practice effects and the effects of extrinsic rewards. Extrinsic rewards are very common in performance contracts. According to Bumstead (1970), the Texarkana project used transistor radios as extrinsic rewards in a performance contract.

The problems of performance contracting have not gone unnoticed. Elam (1971) in a review of the status of performance contracting, stated that "one of the great dangers is that too much will be expected too soon . . . inadequate planning, misapplication and poor management may discredit the whole concept." The problems of testing in performance contracts are many, only one of which is the effect of extrinsic rewards on test performance. Stake (1971) has described a number of additional problems. We now need studies which examine these measurement problems in actual performance contracting situations. Was the federal investment (USOE and OEO) of between 10 and 15 million dollars on performance contracting in fiscal 1971 accompanied by appropriate safeguards? Those who are unsophisticated in the problems of measurement could have paid thousands of dollars for $75 worth of transistor radios, sweatshirts, and candy bars.

In almost all performance contracting experiments the pupil-teacher ratio has been drastically increased by adding low-paid paraprofessionals and reducing the number of professional teachers. The money saved goes to the high-priced consultants. The major ingredients of most contracted experiments are machine-oriented programmed materials and extrinsic reward systems (tokens

recreation time, green stamps, color TV sets).

Performance-based teacher certification is a proposal of the Regents Master Plan for the Development of Post-Secondary Education, 1972. The concept "performance-based" teacher education is construed as performance-based if the competencies (knowledge, skills, behaviors) to be demonstrated by the potential teachers are explicit, measurable, and public; and if the criteria to be employed in assessing competencies are based on the competencies, explicit, and public; and if the assessment of the potential teacher's competencies uses his performance as the primary source of evidence and if it is objective. The field-centered approach to teacher education and certification is another term with many meanings, but as used here it means that most, but not necessarily all, teacher education be conducted in schools or other educational agencies in the community. Field-centered preparation may include simulation, games, and other methods that are reality-related to develop particular desirable behaviors in the prospective teacher.

Our present mandatory requirement of a baccalaureate degree for elementary school teachers, special subject teachers, and teachers of academic subjects was established in 1936. In 1943, the fifth-year requirement was enacted for teachers of academic and special subjects. In 1963, this requirement was extended to all elementary school teachers. These three key dates represent major modifications in New York's system of preparing most public school teachers, although the same basic approach to teacher preparation continued. In addition, 30 semester hours of graduate study were required.

The Regents' goal for teacher preparation and certification are as follows:

1. Pupil performance should be the underlying basis for judging teacher competence. (Such a basis is not now fully obtainable because of the limited knowledge about measurement itself.)

2. The basis for certification should be teacher competence rather than total reliance on college courses. The possession of a State certificate should represent an acceptable level of competence in general background knowledge, subject matter knowledge, and teaching skill.

3. The preparation of teachers should involve a number of pertinent agencies and individuals, including schools, higher institutions, professional staffs, and relevant agencies.

4. Like other professions, teaching requires that professional personnel undergo continuous training; consequently, teachers should be expected to demonstrate competency periodically to maintain certification.

5. The separation of preparation, certification, and employment must be maintained. In other words, neither the teacher education institution nor the employer should certify the teacher.

6. Efficient use of staff talents and organizational flexibility can be accomplished by differentiating the roles and functions of staff members including the use of paraprofessional personnel. It becomes necessary, therefore, that there be a training program for auxiliary personnel appropriate to and coordinated with programs to prepare teachers so that the instructional team effort can be most rewarding for pupils.

In addition, the Regents' goal for the preparation and practice of professional personnel in the schools is to establish a system of certification by which the State can assure the public that professional personnel in the schools possess and maintain demonstrated competence to enable children to learn.

In this document, the Regents says: "Rapid and significant change has occurred in the economic, cultural, and educational

facets of our society. These changes indicate the need for a thorough reform of teacher education, certification, and practice. The reform must ensure that the public school professional staffs continue to be responsive to changing demands of school and society. It must result in a system that is competency-based and field-centered . . . Pupil performance should be the underlying basis for judging teacher competence."

But in the very next sentence in the report, the Regents admit: "Such a basis is not now fully obtainable because of the limited knowledge about measurement itself." Just as teachers are keenly aware of the destructive retrogression that has occurred when poorly-researched and ill-advised change has been imposed on the schools by visionary bureaucrats. Quite often, such change has violated both the principles of learning and plain old common sense.

The competency-based concept completely undermines tenure and teacher rights to due process through what is in reality a revocation of license. It is this writer's firm position that teachers should have a part in shaping standards for certification and in determining curriculum. We will be accountable when our knowledge about the needs of youngsters in school becomes a part of planning the total educational structure. Until then, governmental bodies and administrators will have to bear the responsibility. Students and teachers will no longer be victimized by a simplistic approach to a concept that has caught the public fancy. The nation's schools cannot be run like industry. Dollars in and a visible and measurable product out are the criteria of many of the accountability measure being placed on schools today. These may be

appropriate for an industry that produces paper clips but are hardly responsible measuring devices for determining the effect of schooling on students.

The competency-based education proposal, as presented in the Regents Master Plan could become just another educational fad. We are for progress and change. But we will oppose any proposal that is ill-advised. Teachers are as concerned as the Regents in the quality of teaching and in guaranteeing that teachers maintain and increase their competency throughout their careers. But we are not about to endorse change for the sake of change, innovation for the sake of innovation, especially when change and innovation are not backed by solid and substantive research.

Both government and the public must be made to understand that students are not products and education is not a simple cause-and-effect process. Most teachers at this time have so little control over the educational process that it is pure myth that they can be held accountable for the "product".

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